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A LECTURE

DELIVERED BY THE

REV. WILLIAM MOORE,

IN THE

Bank Street Presbyterian Church,

SUNDAY, 31st DECEMBER, 1871.

SUBJECT:

"Is the Church of Rome Infallible?"

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SERMON

“To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word it is because there is no light in them.” Isaiah, chap. viii., 20 verse.

The editor of the *Christian Union*, in a recent issue, speaks of his work during the past year, in the following terms:—“We have assailed and logically routed a large proportion of the heresies of the day. We have touched up the Jews; we have confuted the Unitarians; we have bothered the Catholics; we have utterly confounded the Atheists; the Baptists, with their close communion, have been made to squirm; and as to High Church Episcopalians, we have not left them a leg to stand upon. By all the best known laws of cause and effect, there should be very little remaining of any of these denominations, and yet we are much afraid they all still live and hold each its peculiar tenets as firmly as ever, and perhaps more so for our unanswerable arguments.”

And that, as I take it, is generally the result of controversy. In the sphere of the physical, when we have fought with an enemy and killed him out right, he does not give us any more trouble. Once dead he will stay dead, and we may bury him in peace. Not so, however, in the war of words, or the conflict of opinion. Here the victor's work is never done. The legions which he scattered like leaves before the wind yesterday, as though unconscious of defeat, must be fought over again to-day. Doubtless the good Priest Damen is filled with astonishment that there is even a remnant of Protestantism left in any of the places which have been favored with his fancied unanswerable demonstration of the claims of the

Papacy, to be the only true Church and the infallible expounder of the Scripture, in a word, the representative and mouthpiece of God on earth. No doubt the discomfiture was complete. But somehow, like Milton's angels, we still live, and are able to show as bold a front as though no such redoubtable champion had ever entered the lists against us. The question between us and the Papacy is of the first importance. If the Romish Church is the true spiritual body of Christ, we are in a dangerous position; that once fairly established, it behoves us to submit in order that we may find salvation. If on the other hand it can be shown that her claims are false, then she stands convicted of having usurped the prerogatives of Christ, and it becomes our duty to testify against her, and to call upon others to do the same.

The controversy between Papal and Protestant Christendom may be reduced to a very narrow compass. It is simply this:—Does the Bible, as found in the original Hebrew and Greek, contain the whole revealed mind of God, and is it sufficient under the enlightening influence of the Holy Ghost to guide men to salvation? If sufficient, it needs no supplement. If insufficient, it must be supplemented if men are to be saved. Protestantism says the Bible is sufficient. Romanism says it is not. The Rev. Mr. Damen tries to prove the falsity of our doctrine by a clever *reductio ad absurdum*; his argument under this head may be briefly put thus:—If the Bible alone were a safe guide, we could learn the truth from it; but if we could learn the truth from it, there would be no differences of opinion among Protestants, for truth is one. Instead of unity of faith, one great Protestant Church, we find 352 churches, each of which claims to be right. All cannot be right, therefore, the Bible alone is not a safe guide, in their case, at least, it has not led to a knowledge of the truth. With respect to the statement, that there are 352 Protestant churches, I can only characterise it as a manifest perversion of the truth. If such a number can be made out, it can only be done by counting the great national churches, as not only independent but conflicting powers, no matter how closely they may be allied in polity and doctrine *e. g.*, the Presbyterian Church

is one the world over. Though not one in organic or legislative union, she is one in doctrine and polity, and numbers within her pale in Europe and America some 28,000,000 of people. Out of this one church Mr. Damen would make a great company, the Kirk of Scotland, the Free Church, the United Presbyterian, the English Presbyterian, the Presbyterian Church of Canada in connection with the Church of Scotland, the same in the Lower Provinces, The Presbyterian Church of the Lower Provinces, the Canada Presbyterian Church, the Presbyterian Church North, and the Presbyterian Church South, and I know not how many more. And after all this unfairness he counts as Protestant every infidel sect in existence, not excepting the Mormons and the Free Loveites, and asserts that each and all of these alike profess to draw their inspiration from the Bible, and regard it as the repository of their doctrines. Now, as I can hardly bring myself to believe that Mr. Damen would knowingly be guilty of falsehood, even for the purpose of seeming to weaken the position of an opponent, I am forced to the conclusion that his recklessness is the result of ignorance. Cut away from the great body of Evangelical Christians the brood of anti-Christian sects, which popery delights to count as Protestant, in order to heighten her own claim to unity, and at one single stroke the number of the so called Protestant Churches is mightily reduced. There are, no doubt, many points of difference among Protestants, and these differences I have no desire to ignore or underrate, but they do not exceed the differences which exist among Romanists themselves notwithstanding their boasted unity. But if it be remembered that the points of difference and dispute among Protestants do not touch the foundations of the faith, that each and all alike point the inquiring sinner to Christ as the only Saviour of men, we shall find that there is a real unity of faith and practice pervading Protestant Christendom sufficient to vindicate our doctrine respecting the Bible. But let us for a moment suppose that Mr. Damen is correct when he says there are 352 Protestant Churches. Being Protestant they claim to be Christian. The Romish Church also claims to be Christian. We must, therefore, add one

more to this number, and then we have 353 churches claiming to be Christian from which to select if in search of the true Church. Which shall we acknowledge? Let us begin with the one which has the largest nominal membership, the Romish. This Church claims to be infallible in teaching the truth. This once admitted or fully established, the whole ground is covered and dispute is at an end. Mr. Damen says (pages 13-14), "The Catholic has Divine faith, and why? Because the Catholic says, I believe in such and such a thing. Why? Because the Church teaches me so. And why do I believe the Church? Because God has commanded me to believe the teaching of the Church; and God has threatened me with damnation if I do not believe the Church; and we are taught by St. Peter, in his epistle, that there is no private prophecy or interpretation of the Scriptures." Here notice first, that to prove the doctrine that God commands us to hear the Romish Church, he seems to rely on Mathew, chap. 18, v. 17, this being the only passage in which the words "hear the Church" so often repeated by him, occur in the whole of the New Testament. These words, however, have nothing to do with the case in hand. The whole passage runs thus:—"Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church; but if he neglect to hear the Church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican."

Any man with half an eye can see that this passage lays down a course of conduct to be followed by one who has received, or who thinks he has received an injury at the hand of a Christian brother. The first step is "Go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone." The second step is "If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more," the object being to prevent publicity and yet secure sufficient judicial witness. The third step is "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the Church." That is the whole bearing of that

passage, and it no more obliges us to hear the Romish Church as a teacher than the words of Isaiah the Prophet, "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning to mingle strong drink," oblige us to lie in bed until noon.

Again look at 2nd Peter chap. i., v. 20, 21,—“Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.” These words simply mean that “no prophecy of the Scripture” is the result of human foresight or excogitation; that the Prophets did not utter their own speculations, or speak on their own authority, but, as we learn from the 21st verse, these “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” It takes a magnifying glass of very considerable power to find here any hint that we are not to use our own God-given powers in the study of His Word, but, on the contrary, to hand ourselves over, asking no questions, to the guidance of an infallible church.

But there is still a more serious objection to the good Priest's argument “The Church exists before the Bible.”—“The Bible derives its authority from the Church.”—“We only know what the Bible is when the Church has told us.” Of course, in such a case we can only be sure we have an infallible Bible when we have the word of an infallible church for it. Now what does Mr. Damen say if we ask him, “How do you know that the Bible is infallible?” “Because the *Church* says so, and she is infallible.” “But how do you know that the Church is infallible?” “The Bible says so.” That is to say, he first proves the infallibility of the Bible on the authority of the Church, and then the infallibility of the Church from the book to which she has just certified, which is a manifest circle. Atlas cannot hold the world on his shoulders and have it under his feet at the same time. The Romish Church must either submit to an infallible Bible, which is all we ask, or else she must not bring to prove her own infallibility a book, the authority of which we have first to learn from her own lips. Of this many of the most intelligent and accomplished Romanists are fully aware. Hence, instead of appealing to the Bible to prove the dogma of ecclesiastical infallibility, they assume it as a first principle

or axiom, which we are to hold on its own self-evidencing light, as we hold the existence of God.

Let us then ask, "Is the Romish Church infallible?" This is her own chosen ground, and here she must stand or fall. If her claims are well founded, she has nothing to fear from the most searching investigation, but rather, everything to hope.

Infallibility is thus defined or described by J. H. Newman ("Grammar of Assent," page 215, American edition),—"A man is infallible, whose words are always true; a rule is infallible if it is *unerring in all its possible applications*; an infallible authority is certain in every particular case that may arise." Again, at page 217,—“If, indeed, I claimed to be infallible, ONE FAILURE would shiver my claim to pieces. J. H. Newman is quite as good a Roman Catholic as Priest Damen, and this is his definition. Let us apply to the claim so defined—the test of history. If the Church is infallible, she cannot be self-contradictory in any of her acts or utterances. Moreover, according to her own decision or definition, the attribute of infallibility inheres or centres in the reigning Pope or Bishop of Rome, who is for the time being to be considered as the exponent of her orthodoxy. This being so, each individual pope will be self-consistent in his acts and utterances. He will also be consistent with all the acts and utterances of his predecessors and successors in office. If, then, we can produce even one instance in which a pope has contradicted either himself or his predecessors or his successors, that one instance will be, to use the emphatic language of J. H. Newman, sufficient to “shiver the claim to pieces.”

Pope Innocent I., in a letter to the Council of Milevis, and Pope Gelasius I., in his epistle to the Bishops of Picenum, declared it to be so indispensable for infants to receive communion, that those who die without it go straight to hell. A thousand years later the Council of Trent, and the popes at the head of it, anathematized this doctrine.

Pope Celestine III. tried to loosen the marriage tie, by declaring it dissolved if either party became heretical.

Pope Innocent III. annulled this decision, and Pope Hadrian VI. called Pope Celestine, his infallible predecessor, a heretic for giving it.

Pope Innocent III. declared that the spiritual bond which unites a bishop to his diocese is firmer and more indissoluble than the carnal bond, as he is pleased to call it, which unites man and wife, and that God alone can loosen it, that is, translate a bishop from one diocese to another. But, as the pope is the representative of God on earth, he, and he alone, can dissolve this holy and indissoluble bond, not by human, but by divine authority, and it is God, not man, who looses it. The obvious and direct inference that if the pope can dissolve this most sacred tie, much more may he also dissolve the less firm and holy tie of common wedlock, he entirely overlooked; for on this point he solemnly condemned the decision of Pope Celestine III., thereby unwittingly involving himself in a contradiction.

Pope Nicholas III., in the Decretal "Exiit qui seminat," gave an exposition of the Rule of St. Francis, in which he declared the renunciation of all personal or corporate property to be holy and meritorious, and that Christ Himself had taught this, and confirmed it by His example. The Franciscans were to have the *use* of the property, but its possession inhered in the Roman Church. This decretal was addressed to the whole church, and any gloss or interpretation thereof against the literal sense was forbidden under pain of excommunication. Pope Clement V., in the decretal "Exivi de Paradiso," renewed this ordinance of Nicolas; and Pope John XXII., in the bull "Quorundam," declared—this ordinance of Nicholas III. and Clement V. to be salutary, clear, and of force. After awhile he had a dispute with the Franciscans, the upshot of which was that this same John XXII. issued another bull, in which he declared the distinction between *use* and *possession* impossible, and finally wound up by rejecting the doctrine of his predecessors, that Christ and His Apostles were in word and deed patterns of the Franciscan ideal of poverty, as *heretical* and *hostile* to the Catholic faith. And thus we have the perplexing spectacle of one infallible pope

broadly charging another infallible pope with false doctrine ; nay, more, the same infallible man at one time declaring a thing to be holy and good which soon after he, in the exercise of the same divine power, declares to be unholy and heretical. And because the Franciscans held to the infallibility of Nicolas III. and Clement V. rather than to that of John XXII., there were, between the years 1316 and 1352, no less than 114 of them burned to death,—a course of treatment so often resorted to for the good of the souls of those who unhappily differed from “the Church,” that it may be regarded as her approved method of dealing with heretics.

In connection with the Latin Bible, of which Mr. Damen speaks so highly, this dogma of infallibility received a terrible shock. The Council of Trent pronounced Jerome’s translation authentic, but did not state which edition of it, was to be so considered. The text of all the different editions was, on examination, found to be so imperfect, that there was none to answer the requirements of the council’s decree.

Pope Sixtus V. undertook to provide one, which appeared in due time, garnished and guarded with the usual anathemas. This Bull ordered this edition, corrected with his own hand, to be received and used as the only true and genuine one, and every change, even of a *single word*, was forbidden under pain of anathema.

It soon appeared that his edition was full of blunders, 2,000 of them having been introduced by his own hand. The reign of Gregory XIV. was short, and nothing was done. His successor, Clement VIII. called in the edition of Sixtus V and issued another of his own, which was as carefully fenced in by penal enactments as that of his predecessor. Lest this should shake the confidence of the church in the dogma of infallibility, which was then beginning to obtain currency, the famous Cardinal Bellarmine suggested that the new Pope should save the credit of the old one by saying that the mistakes in the first edition, that of Sixtus V., had been introduced by the carelessness of the printers and others. Bellarmine, himself was commissioned to circulate this lie, and the Pope endorsed it by writing the preface.

In matters more immediately pertaining to the sphere of theology, the Popes are equally unfortunate. Pope Innocent I. confirmed the sentence of the Councils of Carthage and Milevis, which condemned the doctrine of Pelagius and Celestine as heretical. Pope Zozimus, in the year 417, rescinded this judgment, and pronounced Pelagius and Celestine orthodox. The next year, 418, the same Zozimus re-tried the parties, reversed his previous sentence, declared them heretical, excommunicated and anathematised them, and beside all this, he issued a circular letter in which he particularly endorses the verdict of the councils which he had already condemned. And this not by inspiration or enlightenment of the Holy Ghost, but through fear of the Emperor Honorius.

Pope Vigilius, who owed his elevation to the Chair of St. Peter, to a contract with the Empress Theodora, by which he pledged himself to condemn the council of Chalcedon, (a) succeeded in making a singular series of self contradictions. The Emperor Justinian, in 544, issued an edict in which he impliedly at least condemned the Council of Chalcedon. Vigilius first, condemned this edict, then he accepted the edict, and condemned the "three chapters" to which it referred. Soon after, at the instance of the African and Illyrian bishops, he withdrew his condemnation of the said three chapters, and finally completed the circle by renewing his condemnation of the chapters for the sake of the Emperor's friendship (b.)

Pope Honorius, in the controversy as to whether Christ had one will or two, asserted that he had only one. Pope John IV. anathematised the whole sect to which Honorius belonged (c.) Pope Martin I. did the same thing (d.) Pope Theodore anathematised Pyrrhus the Monothelite, and to give greater solemnity to the decree of excommunication, signed it with a pen dipped in consecrated wine (e.) Pope Agatho not only condemned the sect but anathematised Pope Honorius by name (f.)

a. Old Cath. Ch. page 213.

b. Mosheim, p. 232-3.

c. *Ibid.*, p. 256, 57.

d. Old Cath. Ch., p. 215.

e. Dowling, p. 150.

f. Mosheim, 256, & Old Cath. Ch. 216.

Here again we have the spectacle of infallibility arrayed against infallibility. Which are we to believe? If Popes Innocent and Gelasius were right in saying that unless infants receive the communion they must perish, then assuredly the council and its Popes were wrong. If Honorius was right, the Monothelites were orthodox. If Agatho and the others were right, then Honorius was a heretic, and the Romish Church did well to cast his name out of her liturgy, though I shall not say it was well done to mention his name in the Breviary as a person of "*damnatae memoriae*," accursed memory. But I need not go over the entire list. In any instance of contradiction, take which side the Romanist may, it proves equally fatal to the doctrine of the infallibility of the Church as recently defined, for both the parties are in the same line, and equally infallible, if the doctrine be true. From all this, it follows—that the Papacy, the Roman Catholic Church, of which the reigning pope is for the time being the mouth-piece and exponent, has erred. If one example of error would suffice to "shiver the claim of infallibility," what becomes of it when well nigh a round dozen has been fairly established?

In addition to this I shall not charge her with idolatry in the worship of saints and angels, and the invocation of "Mary, the Mother of God." I shall not even hint at the sin of simony with which the whole body, from the head downward, is notoriously infected. I shall not say a word about the moral corruption of which St. Catherine of Sienna said to Pope Gregory XI., "I find in the Court of Rome the stench of infernal vices." On his replying that she had only been there a few days, her answer was, "I dare to say that in my native city I have found the stench of the sins committed in the Curia more oppressive than it is to those who daily commit them." Bishop Coriolano Martorano, of San Marco, who made the opening speech at the Council of Trent, is said by Romanists themselves to have drawn a picture of the Italian Cardinals and Bishops, their bloodthirsty cruelty, their avarice, their pride, and the devastation they had wrought of the Church, which was perfectly shocking. Of these things I shall not say a word. They belong to

a dark and gloomy page in the history of the world, and are too well known to require more than this passing glance. But leaving these aside, and looking only to the self contradictions of the popes and the errors into which they have repeatedly fallen, we find enough to cover the Romish pretensions to infallibility with everlasting disgrace. Yet Mr. Damen says: "Hear me, Jesus, hear what I say? I say, that if the Catholic Church now in the 19th Century, is not the true Church of God, as she was 1838 years ago, then I say, Jesus, thou hast deceived us, and thou art an impostor."

I now join issue with the good priest and say either the Romish Church is not the true Church of God, the living spiritual body of Christ, or Christ is an impostor. He may take the latter horn of the dilemma if he chooses, but I find it much easier to take the first, and to say that the society known as the Roman Catholic Church is not now, and never has been, in any special and exclusive sense, the "Body of Christ," the "Church of the Living God."

Before entering upon a statement of the Protestant doctrine respecting the Church, let it be distinctly understood that the Bible, instead of being received on the authority of the Church, is itself, as the case actually stands, the fountain of all our knowledge of and the sole authority for the existence of the Church. But for the Bible we could not know, either, that there is, or that there was designed to be any such thing as a Church of God on earth. To the Bible therefore, we must look for the history of her establishment, the nature of her constitution, and the extent of her prerogatives.

With this preface, I shall at once proceed to state our doctrine of the Church, and in doing so shall use the language of the Rev. Charles Hodge, D.D., of Princeton, whose statement is probably much more compact, and at the same time more full and comprehensive than any I could produce. It is as follows, viz.:—(1.) The Church as such or in its essential nature, is not an external organization. (2.) All true believers in whom the Spirit of God dwells, are members of that Church which is the Body of Christ, no matter with what ecclesiastical organiza-

tion they may be connected, and even although they have no such connection. The thief on the cross was saved, though he was not a member of any external Church. (3.) Therefore, the attributes, prerogatives, and promises of the Church do not belong to any external society as such, but to the true people of God collectively considered; and to external societies only so far as they consist of true believers, and are controlled by them. This is only saying what every man admits to be true, that the attributes, prerogatives, and promises pertaining to Christians belong exclusively to true Christians, and not to wicked or worldly men who call themselves Christians. (4.) The condition of membership in the true Church is not union with any organized society, but faith in Jesus Christ. They are the children of God by faith; they are the sons of Abraham, heirs of the promise of redemption made to him by faith; whether they be Jew or Gentile, bond or free; whether Protestants or Romanists, Presbyterians or Episcopalians; or whether they be so widely scattered, that no two or three of them are able to meet together for worship.

“Protestants do not deny that there is a visible Church (Catholic) on earth, consisting of all those who profess the true religion, together with their children. But they are not all included in any one external society. They also admit that it is the duty of Christians to unite for the purpose of worship and mutual watch and care. They admit that to such associations and societies certain prerogatives and promises belong; that they have, or ought to have, the officers whose qualifications and duties are prescribed in the Scriptures,—that there always have been and probably always will be, such Christian organizations or visible churches. But they deny that any one of these societies, or all of them collectively constitute the Church for which Christ died; in which He dwells by His Spirit; to which He has promised perpetuity, catholicity, unity, and divine guidance in the knowledge of the truth. Any one of them, or all of them, one after another, may apostatize from the faith, and all the promises of God to his Church be fulfilled. The Church did not fail, when God reserved to himself only seven

thousand in all Isreal who had not bowed the knee unto Baal."

With this statement of the truth, I close the present discussion: May God in His infinite mercy for Christ sake grant that all concerned, whether Romanist or Protestant, being grafted in the true spiritual body of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, may, notwithstanding their misconceptions of his truth, or their lack of charity toward each other; be found at last in the General Assembly and Church of the first-born whose names are written in Heaven. Amen.

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